

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 04459 151354Z
ACTION NODS-00

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S E C R E T DAMASCUS 4459

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, UN, IS, SY
SUBJECT: ISRAELI REQUEST FOR RETURN OF REMAINS OF ELI COHEN

1. SYRIA'S DEPUTY LIAISON OFFICER TO ISMAC AND UN FORCES, MAJOR NIZAR SHAQRA, DISCUSSED WITH ME JULY 14 RECENT EXPRESSIONS OF ISRAELI INTEREST IN RECOVERY OF REMAINS ELI COHEN. (MASTER SPY COHEN HUNG IN DAMASCUS IN 1975.) WITHIN THE PAST WEEK, USING TWO SEPARATE UN CHANNELS, GOI HAS REAISED THIS ISSUED STATING THAT THE NEW LEADERSHIP WOULD CONSIDER RETURN OF THE REMAINS A POSTIVE SIGNAL BY SYRIA. INSTHE FIRST INSTANCE, FNOMIN DAYAN AND DEFMIN WEITZMAN SPOKE TO UNDOF COMMANDER GENERAL PHILLIP AND TRANSMITTED ORAL REQUEST FOR RETURN OF REMAINS. SUBSEQUENTLY, PRIMIN BEGIN ADDRESSED A LETTER TO CHIEF COORDINATOR UNEF/UNTSO GENERAL SILAASVUO WHICH WAS DELIVERED TO DAMASCUS UNDER COVERING LETTER FROM SILAASVUO ON JULY 13.

2. SHAQRA, WHO IS ACTING IN CHARGE OF SARG'S LIAISON OFFICE IN THE AVSENCE OF HIS SUPERIOR BRIG GENERAL TAYARRA, SIAD THAT HE HAD RELAYED PHILLIP'S ORAL MESSAGE TO COS SHIHABI LAST WEEK. SHIHABI HAD CURTLY REPLIED THAT THIS WAS A POLITICAL SUBJECT AND NOT TO BE DEALT WITH IN MILITARY CHANNELS.

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3. SHAQRA SAID HE PERSONALLY BELIEVED SYRIA WOULD GAIN BY RESPONDING POSITIVELY TO BEGIN'S REQUEST. HE HAD NOTED THE PUBLIC RELATIONS BENEFITS ACHIEVED BY EGYPT THROUGH MEDIUM OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S PRESS CONCERANCE IN RETURNING THE REMAINS OF 19 ISRAELI SOLDIERS RECENTLY DISCOVERED IN THE SINAI. SHAQRA ASKED WHETHER I AGREED WITH HIM THAT IT WOULD BE A USEFUL GESTURE TO RETURN COHEN'S REMAINS. REPLIED THAT

THIS WAS EXCELLENT TIME FOR DAMASCUS TO SEND SOME SORT OF GOODWILL SIGNAL TO THE ISRAELIS. SUCH GESTURES HAD BEEN FEW AND FAR BETWEEN AND SINCE BEGIN HAD MADE THIS SO PERSONAL AN ISSUE, I HOPED THAT THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP WOULD GIVE IT SERIOUS CONSIDERATION. SHAQRA NOTED THAT HE HAD A TIMING PROBLEM. WHILE SYRIA WILL HAVE TO ANSWER SILLAASVUO'S FORMAL LETTER AND NOT BRUSH IT ASIDE AS SHIHABI DID THE ORAL MESSAGE, HE WANTED TO WAIT A FEW DAYS BEFORE GOING BACK AGAIN TO SHIHABI ON THIS QUESTION. HOWEVER, HE COULD NOT WAIT MORE THAN A WEEK WHEN HIS OWN BOSS WILL RETURN AND HE WAS CERTAIN THAT GENERAL TAYARRA WOULD ARGUE STRONGLY AGAINST RETURN OF COHEN'S REMAINS. TAYARRA CONTINUES TO FEEL PARTICULARLY BITTER ABOUT THE COHEN CASE, PERHAPS BECAUSE HE WAS COHEN'S CHIEF INTERROGATOR IN 1965.

4. SHAQRA SAID THAT THERE WAS THE PROBABILITY THAT ISRAEL WOULD GIVE COHEN A MAJOR STATE FUNERAL AND FULL HONORS WHICH WOULD REMIND SYRIANS OF THE HUMILIATING CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING COHEN'S EXTRAORDINARILY SUCCESSFUL ESPIONAGE MISSION BUT, HE CONTINUED, "THEY HAVE ALREADY NAMED THE STREETS AFTER HIM IN ISRAEL."

5. SHAQRA THEN ASKED WHETHER I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF HE FOUND WAY TO MENTION TO SHIHABI HE HAD DISCUSSED QUESTION WITH ME AND I RECOMMENDED RETURN OF THE REMAINS. SAID I FRANKLY BELIEVED THIS WOULD BE UNHELPFUL. I HAD BEEN
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TELLING SYRIAN LEADERSHIP THAT THEY SHOULD BE THINKING OF WAYS TO BE MORE FORTHCOMING ON THE NATURE AND QUALITY OF PEACE BUT I DOUBTED THAT DIRECT IDENTIFICATION OF THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR WITH BEGIN'S REQUEST RE COHEN'S REMAINS WOULD HELP. SHAQRA AFTER FURTHER REFLECTION AGREED AND SAID HE WOULD AT MOST SAY TO SHIHABI THAT IN A CONVERSATION WITH ME, I HAD MENTIONED THE CASE OF THE RETURN OF THE REMAINS OF THE 19 ISRAELI SOLDIERS BY THE EGYPTIANS AND HOW VALUABLE SUCH GESTURES COULD BE IN CREATING A BETTER ATMOSPHERE IN THE AREA.

6. COMMENT:

IN LIGHT POSSIBILITY NO FORMAL RECORD WAS MADE, WISH TO RECORD THAT ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM SECRETARY KISSINGER, I RAISED THIS QUESTION WITH FONMIN KHADDAM DURING HIS INITIAL VISIT TO WASHINGTON IN AUGUST 1974. MY DEMARCHE WAS RECEIVED IN STONY SILENCE AND KHADDAM NEVER AGAIN REFERRED TO IT.
MURPHY

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Channel Indicators: n/a
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Sent Date: 15-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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